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Progress report on UNICEF engagement in sector-wide approaches to development

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to Executive Board decision 2001/11 (E/ICEF/2001/6). Placing sector-wide approaches to development (SWAps) in the context of existing and emerging development financing initiatives, the report highlights the UNICEF contributions to SWAps. It presents reflections on perceived benefits and constraints of UNICEF engagement in SWAps and discusses progress made in strengthening the organization's capacity to participate in them. The report draws heavily on the findings of assessments of UNICEF experience with SWAps and the annual reports of UNICEF country offices presently involved in SWAps.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in response to Executive Board decision 2001/11 (E/ICEF/2001/6), in which the Board encouraged the Executive Director to further strengthen UNICEF participation in sector-wide approaches to development (SWAps) and to ensure adequate staff training in this area. The Board also requested the Executive Director to report on benefits, constraints and impediments with regard to UNICEF participation in SWAps, including financial participation.

II. Sector-wide approaches in the context of new development initiatives

2. Since sector-based programmes were introduced in the early 1990s, a number of other development initiatives have emerged, some with a broader scope than SWAps and others with a narrower focus. At the global level, the World Summit for Social Development launched the international development goals in 1995. The General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and A World Fit for Children in 2002. These initiatives articulated broad agendas for poverty reduction, including specific targets to be achieved between 2010 and 2015. In 1999, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund introduced the enhanced Debt Initiative for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) and its operational tool, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), to reduce the debt burden of the 42 poorest countries. African leaders adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001. Other initiatives — such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the World Bank's Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Program — have largely centred on resource mobilization for specific interventions.

3. The PRSP initiative, which now is being delinked from HIPC and increasingly is the central country-led strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, focuses largely on Africa, where most SWAps are being implemented. Consequently, many of the countries involved with SWAps are dealing with several initiatives at the same time. PRSPs in particular have absorbed the attention of numerous Governments since 2001 and have drawn important support from donors and civil society. At present, the relationship and sequencing between SWAps and PRSPs are evolving, with the potential for both complementarity and tension between them. Where a SWAp was once the primary instrument for unifying international support for sectoral reform, there are now several initiatives, posing a challenge to national Governments and to multilateral and bilateral agencies.

III. The UNICEF contribution to sector-wide approaches

4. UNICEF is participating to varying degrees in evolving SWAps and sectoral development programmes in 20 countries, mostly in the health and education sectors. SWAp processes are in early stages of development in countries including Burkina Faso, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Mauritania, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda and Yemen. The implementation of these processes is relatively more advanced in such other countries as Bangladesh, Cambodia,

Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Senegal, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam and Zambia. Within this grouping, some countries have several SWAps that are at different stages of development. UNICEF offices increasingly have supported consultations on SWAps from the early planning stages. At country level, four elements represent the UNICEF inputs to SWAps: advocacy for children; technical support for design and monitoring activities; support to cross-sectoral activities that are relevant to the sectoral priorities; and material support (supplies and funding).

A. Advocacy

5. UNICEF works to place children, and the fulfilment of their rights and needs, at the centre of SWAps, which offer the opportunity for improving the situation of children and to which the organization can contribute using its comparative advantages. UNICEF offices in countries implementing a SWAp seek to contribute a child-related perspective to the policy debate and assist national partners in ensuring that SWAps reflect, as far as possible:

(a) Key human and child rights principles of universality and non-discrimination, the right to survival and development, the right to participation and self-expression and consideration of the best interests of the child;

(b) A holistic, child-centred approach which recognizes children as holders of rights;

(c) The incorporation of development goals and objectives in SWAps which are relevant to children and women, and of key programme components that address their needs;

(d) An operational approach which incorporates, wherever necessary, cross-sectoral perspectives and which promotes the participation of local, civil society and non-governmental stakeholders in the SWAp process.

6. In Mali, for example, UNICEF is supporting the SWAp for the justice system at national and subnational levels through advocating codes and legislative texts relating to children's and women's rights, and through support for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. In Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF stressed the need for SWAps to enhance the involvement of communities, especially through school committees, and to address issues hampering girls' education. In Uganda, UNICEF is a member of the working groups on disadvantaged groups and girl's education. In Ghana, UNICEF advocated for, identified and supported activities to reduce geographical, gender and socio-economic disparities by improving systems for monitoring disaggregated indicators on health and education.

B. Design formulation and monitoring of sector-wide approaches

7. The design phase of SWAps is generally demanding, involving the adaptation of their concepts to country situations, conducting multiple appraisals, and defining sectoral priorities, plans and tools for monitoring performance. Governments often seek assistance from development partners to meet these challenges. In Nepal,

UNICEF, together with the Governments of Finland and Norway, provided technical assistance for designing the "Core Implementation Plan" for education. In Ethiopia, UNICEF assisted subregional authorities in finalizing their plans and strengthening health services. In Cambodia, UNICEF was one of five agencies assisting the Government in the development of essential services and delivery strategies for the health SWAp. In Malawi, UNICEF led the team that developed and costed the package of essential health services. In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF assisted the Government with the costing of district health services. In Mali, a decade-long collaboration between UNICEF and the World Bank gave the Government the technical and financial support it needed to develop district-based health strategies, a core element of the health SWAp.

8. UNICEF has also contributed significantly to monitoring aspects of SWAps. In Ethiopia, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) received a special of acknowledgement from the Ministry of Health for their contribution to the mid-term review of the health SWAp in 2001. In Bangladesh and Uganda, UNICEF staff chaired key working groups during the mid-term review of sectoral programmes.

C. Cross-sectoral work

9. Another UNICEF contribution to SWAps is its support to cross-sectoral activities, which in turn enhance the attainment of such sectoral goals as nutrition, gender and sanitation. There is a risk that these issues might not receive sufficient attention if the boundaries of a SWAp are narrowly defined. UNICEF supports such decentralized institutions as local government, civil society organizations (CSOs) and community groups to enhance the achievement of sectoral goals in Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Mozambique, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania. Additionally, UNICEF has fostered technical interventions and innovative work to demonstrate the feasibility of expanding service coverage to reach the poor. SWAps facilitated the expansion of innovative activities initiated with UNICEF assistance, including nutrition and safe motherhood in Bangladesh, community-based education initiatives and girls' education in Senegal and operational guidelines for supporting districts in Uganda.

10. A number of factors enhance the effectiveness of UNICEF in cross-sectoral work. These include the organization's deep understanding of the situation of children and women; a capacity for creating broad alliances and fostering consensus between government and civil society; a capacity to work at national and subnational levels in both policy-related and programmatic forums; and a capacity to design and achieve results through integrated programmes which address the complex causes of the non-fulfilment of children's rights, and of the manifestations of poverty.

D. Financial contribution

11. UNICEF has contributed significantly to the overall mobilization of resources for sectors with a SWAp and has served as a channel for funds from bilateral donors which, together with international financial institutions, contribute funds directly to Governments implementing SWAps. Governments often appreciate UNICEF more for the speed and flexibility with which it can disburse funds, especially in response

to contingency needs and sudden developments, and for its willingness to test innovative approaches, than for the size of its financial contribution, which will usually be modest. UNICEF contributions to SWAps come in the form of supplies, technical assistance or cash assistance. As reviewed above, UNICEF funding has been instrumental in supporting innovative activities in health and education, fostering cross-sectoral work and encouraging the engagement of CSOs and communities in sectoral activities.

12. Of the 20 countries with evolving SWAps and related initiatives, only five (Bangladesh, Ghana, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia) prefer the pooling of resources (basket funding/budget support).[1] For example, Mozambique has a pooling mechanism for drugs and technical assistance, and Ethiopia offers partners four options for channelling resources to the Government. Despite its popularity in some countries, total pooling of all resources for a sector has not been achieved in any country. To date, funds channelled through pooled/budget support mechanisms represent only 17 per cent of donor funding for sectoral programmes.[2] UNICEF is only one of many development partners providing Governments earmarked funds in parallel with the basket mechanism.

13. A 2001 study by the United Kingdom Department for International Development in the United Republic of Tanzania found that 15 of the 23 development partners operating in the country[3] did not use the health sector basket fund. The other eight partners[4] used the basket approach to deliver part of their aid to the health sector. In those five countries where pooling of resources exists, in the event that UNICEF and partner Governments were to consider that the situation of children in the sector could best be advanced by contributing the organization's limited funds to the common basket, UNICEF financial rules and regulations accommodate such a preference, provided that strict standards of reporting and accountability can be applied.

IV. The benefits of engagement

14. A clear rationale for UNICEF engagement can be discerned in the feedback from its field offices. Country offices see significant potential gains for children within a SWAp, including opportunities to influence policies, advocate for children, mobilize resources, improve the coverage, quality and efficiency of services and reduce morbidity and mortality.

15. Overall, the experience of UNICEF with SWAps has been very positive. A number of country offices have cited specific achievements for children that they associated directly with this initiative. UNICEF Mali noted that donor support to the health and education SWAp has increased the amount of financial resources available for children, especially in the areas of primary health care and basic education. UNICEF Bangladesh reported better consensus on health problems and priorities, leading to a systematic response to the challenges facing the health sector. In Malawi, UNICEF observed that with the SWAp, the education sector has an orderly and synergistic programming landscape. Teachers in Nepal are said to have benefited from more systemic support through a resource centre system included in the SWAp. The UNICEF offices in Bolivia, Cambodia and Nepal reported increased school enrolment rates, and those in Bangladesh and the United Republic of Tanzania reported a decline in morbidity and mortality rates.

V. Constraints

16. In some cases, SWAps have been somewhat limited by the narrow definition of a sector. For example, the health sector at times has been defined so as to limit it to the public sector where the health ministry has direct oversight responsibilities, rather than including other important and related areas. Nutrition, gender and sanitation are such cross-sectoral issues which need increased attention within SWAps because of their impact on children's health and education. By narrowly defining a sector, SWAps run the risk of marginalizing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and communities, thus missing the opportunity to allow important stakeholders to participate. In health, these include private not-for-profit providers, the uniformed services, private sector groups and practitioners of traditional medicine. During the design and planning phases of SWAps, UNICEF advocates that these cross-sectoral issues be included as part of its work to put children at the centre of development.

17. The most common concern of UNICEF country offices is to ensure the capacity of staff to maintain the focus on children in the dialogue raised by the SWAp, as some staff have limited experience in operating at the wider sectoral level. The issue of staff capacity is heightened by a rapidly changing environment and the pressures of such multiple coordination instruments as SWAps, PRSPs, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and such global or regional initiatives as GAVI or NEPAD. These initiatives occur concurrently in some countries, creating a very real problem for UNICEF (as for Governments) in terms of shortages of staff to devote to these time-consuming processes, and the concomitant need to establish criteria for the inevitable trade-offs imposed by managing these demands.[5]

VI. Strengthening capacity for effective engagement in SWAps

18. Since the adoption of decision 2001/11, UNICEF has taken systematic action to monitor country offices' experiences of participating in SWAps. First, the formats for the country offices' annual reports and regional analysis reports were revised to include information on SWAps. Secondly, the two UNICEF regional offices in Africa, which has the highest number of SWAps, established networks which address partnership issues as they relate to SWAps and such other initiatives as PRSPs and which facilitate the exchange of country experiences and support internal capacity development. UNICEF regional and global consultations feature SWAps prominently on their agendas. Finally, UNICEF headquarters has been monitoring the organization's evolving role in these initiatives.

19. The need to develop staff capacities to participate meaningfully in policy dialogue on SWAps and in their implementation is being addressed by UNICEF in coordination with other development partners. At a global level, the Inter-Agency Group on Sector-wide Approaches was instrumental in the development of a comprehensive training package on SWAps and the staging of five regional workshops since September 2001. The workshops (in Nairobi, Kenya; Hanoi, Viet Nam; Managua, Nicaragua; Dakar, Senegal; and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) attracted nearly 200 participants representing national Governments, bilateral donors, multilateral agencies and NGOs. The Governments of the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden and WHO donated funds for the initiative. The secretariat of the Inter-Agency Group and its members (including bilateral donors and United Nations

agencies) provided the overall guidance. UNICEF staff from 15 country offices in five regions attended the workshops. The participants remarked that the workshops contributed to better understanding of SWAps and facilitated exchange of knowledge about their development and implementation.

20. In addition to the inter-agency training, UNICEF carried out other activities to address capacity gaps. SWAps now feature prominently on the agendas of the Regional Management Teams in Africa and in the annual consultations of technical officers, planning officers and program coordinators. SWAps and guidance for UNICEF participation are reflected in the latest version of the Programme Processes and Procedures Manual, the reference document on programming for UNICEF staff worldwide. Progress is reviewed in the annual reports from country offices and annual regional analysis reports. The West and Central Africa Regional Office launched a capacity development initiative on partnerships, focused especially on SWAps. These efforts received a boost early this year with a grant from the Government of Norway, which is supporting various activities including focused workshops, thematic studies on such issues as gender and partnerships, disparity analysis and collaboration between UNICEF and NGOs on child rights issues within SWAp and PRSP frameworks. Late in 2002, the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office task force on SWAps is planning an in-depth workshop for UNICEF staff in the region, to explore child rights issues in the contexts of SWAps, the gender dimension and community involvement in SWAp processes. Resource persons for this workshop will include UNICEF staff who took part in the Inter-Agency Group workshop in Nairobi in September 2001.

VII. Conclusions

21. Overall, the review of country experiences shows extensive and multidimensional engagement by UNICEF in SWAps. As part of its work to place children at the centre of development strategies, UNICEF will strengthen its participation in SWAps and in all other initiatives and development frameworks which offer the opportunity for improving the situation of children, and to which the organization can contribute. UNICEF will advocate that SWAps, PRSPs and other development frameworks incorporate objectives which are relevant to the fulfilment of children's rights, with cross-sectoral perspectives and strategies for the empowerment of families, communities, local government and CSOs both to contribute to and hold Governments accountable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The comparative advantage of UNICEF will continue to be in supporting and developing strategies of advocacy, service delivery, capacity development and empowerment, rather than in funding, which will usually be modest and catalytic in nature.

22. In the current dynamic environment, where SWAps are just one of several development coordination mechanisms and where PRSPs increasingly are gaining pre-eminence as the strategic instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, UNICEF will continuously assess how and where it can best place its limited resources for the fulfilment of children's needs and rights. It will seek partnerships and build alliances with the members of the United Nations Development Group, the World Bank, donors, national Governments and CSOs, as well as with children and young people themselves, and aim to ensure that the goals of the medium-term strategic plan, A World Fit for Children and the Millennium Declaration are central

to all development efforts. To do so successfully, the capacities of staff for policy dialogue, analysis and design, and for communication and negotiation, must be increased. These are not small challenges, and UNICEF has begun to address them at country, regional and headquarters levels, paying particular attention to Africa, where the majority of SWAps and PRSPs are implemented.

Notes

[1] Institute for Health Sector Development/WHO, 2002.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Spain, Sweden, United States, European Union, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF and WHO.

[4] Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom, World Bank.

[5] For example, see Riddel, A., "Sector-wide Approaches in Education: Implications for Donor Agencies and Issues Arising from Case Studies of Zambia and Mozambique", 2001.